



March 13, 2009

Floor cutoff...we're halfway through!

Greetings friends and neighbors,

It's the end of week nine and what a week it's been! Yesterday was "floor cutoff," which means it was the last day to consider bills in their house of origin. So far, the 2009 legislative session has been pretty darn interesting.

Each day, I've been on the Senate floor around 9 or 9:30 in the morning, depending on when the majority floor leader decides to start the day's businesses. We're given a sheet of paper with the bills that we're going to consider about three minutes before we start debating the bill. **Sometimes we don't know what bill we're debating until the majority party moves it for consideration.** I have to be able to make up my mind on an issue literally within minutes, so it really keeps you on your toes!

Frankly, the system has room for improvement. If you're unfamiliar with a bill or it didn't come through your committee, there really isn't a lot of time to study the bill and make informed decisions. The only thing that helps somewhat is our floor calendar, which is a yellow booklet about an inch thick that we receive each day, which describes the basics of each bill. I'll be bringing some of those to my town hall meetings so you can see them in person and get an idea of how it works here in Olympia.

To make my decision on bills, I'll use the floor calendar and any relevant bill documents to figure out what would be best for our district. One thing that makes the process a bit more difficult is what are called "960 bills," or bills that could signify a tax or fee based on the parameters of Initiative 960. Examples of those kinds of bills would be an increase in the cost of a boat license, with the extra revenue going to a boating safety program.

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I try to vote “no” on almost every 960 bill, but I believe a few of the bills are important enough to get my “yes” vote. I have to weigh the importance of the bill against how much it will impact taxpayers, and that’s how I make my decisions.

SB 5735 – Cap-and-tax bill would threaten jobs

One of the more controversial bills we’ve debated this session is [Senate Bill 5735](#), the governor’s cap-and-tax proposal. In its original form, [SB 5735](#) would have instituted an artificial cap on carbon emissions produced by state businesses, and taxed them if they exceeded the arbitrarily designated amount. Businesses could then either buy “carbon credits,” which the state would just happen to be selling, or trade them among other businesses.



We all know the bottom line, when it comes to businesses, is the bottom line.

Forcing state businesses to spend more money in a time when they are already threatened by a down economy would either cause them to cut jobs or close up shop and move out of state. That means that many of the locally-produced products or services you buy would no longer be available, so you can see that this bill would negatively affect not only businesses, but individuals as well.

The bill that eventually passed was a watered-down version of the original, but the intent is clear. This state means to begin instituting mandates on businesses as soon as it can. Proponents of the bill claim that Washington will be the national leader in greenhouse gas emission reduction, even though **our state produces only a fraction of one percent of the overall global greenhouse gas emissions.**

Supporters also claim that there is scientific proof to back up their claims, however when Senate Republicans proposed an amendment which would have given control of the plan to an outside, neutral entity rather than the governor’s Department of Ecology, it was rejected. For all of these reasons, I voted against this bill, however the majority party passed it out and it will now be considered in the House of Representatives.

Employer gag bill scrapped after scandal arises

Another interesting turn of events this week involved the employer gag bill, which would have infringed on our First Amendment right to free speech. The full story on this issue hasn't been revealed yet, but we do know that **an e-mail was made public that linked the supporters of the bill to Democrat campaign activity**. For that reason, the governor, Speaker of the House Frank Chopp and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown decided to kill the bill before it went any further.

Even though the bill is no longer a threat, the idea is still out there. The reason we call [Senate Bill 5446](#) a gag bill is because employers wouldn't be allowed to talk about religion, politics, labor, charity events, and other topics as well. They wouldn't even be allowed to wish their employees a merry Christmas. As one of my colleagues, who is a pastor, said during his floor speech, **he can't even write a payroll check because they say "In God We Trust" on them**.

I believe this bill would have been a violation of our First Amendment rights, so I'm glad to see it die, however I'll remain on the lookout to see if it makes another appearance next session.



Raiding the unemployment insurance fund

One of the bills that I had particular issues with was [Senate Bill 5809](#), which would divert funds from the unemployment insurance fund, essentially creating a new tax on employers. Senate Republicans argued that because of this, the bill had I-960 implications and should require a 2/3 vote of the Senate to pass. Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen agreed, and the bill was shelved until the majority party could amend it.

The Unemployment Insurance fund has about \$4 billion in it right now, and because of our state's rising unemployment rate, **we need to keep that money available for that purpose**. [SB 5809](#) would have taken money out of that fund and put it toward workforce training. That's a violation of federal law, so the bill was amended before it was passed by the Senate.

I voted against the first version because in my mind, employers contribute to the fund for a specific purpose, which is what federal law requires as well. Once the bill was amended I was able to vote for it in good conscience and it passed 48-1.

I'm listening to you

Tomorrow, I'll be holding a series of town hall meetings around our district and I'd love to see you there! I hope you can join me at one of the following locations:

Saturday, March 14

- 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.
Rosemont Assisted Living
215 Killion Road NW – Yelm
- 11:00 a.m. to noon
Central Pierce Fire and Rescue #60
17520 22nd Avenue East – Spanaway
- 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Orting Senior Center
120 North Washington Avenue – Orting

In closing...

If you'd like to share your concerns with me or ask me a question, please feel free to send me an e-mail to becker.randi@leg.wa.gov. You can also visit my legislative website at www.SenateRepublicans.wa.gov/Becker, where you'll find a link to my [sponsored bills](#) where you can keep track of what I'm doing. **And please consider forwarding this e-mail to anyone you think might be interested in receiving it. Ask them to contact me so I can add them to my distribution list.**

I look forward to your comments and suggestions on these issues or anything else coming before the Legislature. My office phone number is (360) 786-7602, or you can write me at 115B Irv Newhouse Building, Olympia, WA 98504. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you in the Washington State Senate. It is truly an honor.

Sincerely,



Randi Becker
2nd District State Senator

